

# HALLOWEEN LORE

A collection  
of folklore



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This is a collection of articles written on Halloween and related topics such as witchcraft and spooky sprites. While the articles have been available online, they have never before been collected in book format. It was originally compiled for Patreon subscribers who receive e-books at a discounted rate. I hope you enjoy it!



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# 1 Introduction

Collected herein are articles on the subject of Halloween and of spooky spirits from European, mainly British, folklore. These articles have been published elsewhere individually, but are presented as a collection and in book form for the first time as a Patreon edition.

The articles presented here were written over several years, and prior to the recent Fairy Tales Series that we have been exploring together recently. But, this is some of the groundwork that was laid down prior that I have been building off of for that series.

Within the Fairy Tales Series we have seen how indigenous belief lingered on in our fairy tales. Witch trial studies (which I am about to revisit and produce more content on) also demonstrate that elements in these stories were not simply fantasy, but were part of everyday life for common folk in Europe well into the Modern Era.

Pagan elements abound at all of our major holidays, and, indeed, throughout the year in minor holidays that have faded away in modern times. But, Halloween stands out as *the* major holiday

that is still overt with its pagan connotations. So, it makes a nice case study to look at the lore, the folktales, take a peek at witchcraft beliefs, and to look at some of the beliefs in spirits that people held in the past.

By looking at these different examples of folk belief, we can begin to see how paganism was very much alive in the regular lifestyles of our recent ancestors. In folklore, we can see beliefs and practices that are confirmed to have been lived out in real life when we look at witch trial records. Then, we can take all of this and look at fairy tales, wherein we find deeper spiritual elements. All of this can and does add up to a cohesive and living faith. And I will continue to keep working at understanding it so that I can present to you a full tome laying out our not lost, but only hidden, Native European Faith.



*A witch by Ida Rentoul Outhwaite*

## **2 The Lost History of the Jack O'Lantern**

### **Getting to the Roots of Our Holidays**

Like most of our holiday rituals and traditions, getting to the true roots of the origins proves difficult. There is a lot of bad research out there, and stories told by sources like the History Channel which are based on lazy and inadequate research.

The true history of many of our traditions and customs have become lost in the annals of time. The average person does not sit around reading folklore journals from the 1800s or search for out of print folklore books (only geeks like me do that!), but learns history from mass media, which often doesn't get the story quite right.

Add to that, over the last century America emerged as the global media giant. So American television and film has been viewed all around the world for generations. I believe this has caused some confusion when it comes to certain folk customs which came to America from Britain, died

out in Britain, but remained popular in American culture.

So, I am not going to give you a rundown of Halloween in the last century, of young Scots-Irish-American scamps running around the streets making mischief at the turn of the 20th century. You can find enough of that on the History Channel. I like to pick up where the History Channel leaves off and take you back further to the ancient pagan origins of our modern holidays.

Because much of this occurred in pre-history (in the context of oral cultures who did not leave written records), we can find our hidden history buried within a field that doesn't get the attention it deserves these days: folklore.



*Photo by Matthew Gordon on Wiki Commons*

## **Jack O'Lantern: The Basics**

As many already know, the O in Jack O'Lantern is a contraction for "of." It is more or less slang for "Jack of the Lantern." There were originally regional variations in different parts of Britain such as Jack-a-Lantern, Jacky Lantern, Jack w' a Lantern, and likely others.

So what exactly did this mean? Well Jack was often used as a euphemism for a spirit. It could sometimes be a clownish figure, a good spirit or a bad spirit, a nature guardian, or other folkloric figures. You see more examples of Jack as a spirit in other folkloric motifs such as Jack in the Green (and a myriad of other Jacks in British folklore: Jack Frost, Jack-in-Irons, Jack o'Legs, and many more).

And, as with all of our ancestral customs and beliefs from the days when celebrations were not described in books or dictated at the pulpit, the lore associated with these customs varied over time and by geography.



## Where Did Jack O'Lantern Come From?

It seems likely that Jack O'Lantern has ties to pre-Christian origins. We arrive at this conclusion not by hard evidence like a written record, because the inhabitants of Britain did not record things in writing during the pre-Christian era.

We assume the pagan origins of folk customs like the Jack O'Lantern by analyzing them within the context and framework in which they are presented in the folklore, as well as in the larger folk culture.

Halloween evolved from the old Celtic pagan holiday Samhain, which was considered the start of the New Year to the ancient Celts. Calendar high days were recognized by the many other cultures in Europe at similar times throughout the year, and often had similar meanings and practices. But they would, of course be known by different names in different regions. For example, the October 31st festival on the Isle of Man was called *Hop-tu-Naa*.

Samhain was considered a day of very high spiritual activity, when the veil between the worlds became so thin that spirits could slip through very easily. It was a time to honor the dead and

ancestors who had passed. But it was also a time to be weary of malicious spirits.

Various superstitious or magical traditions (depending on your point of view) were used to ward off evil and protect the home. The original Jack O'Lanterns were carved from turnips, beets, or gourds. The intention behind the practice was to scare spirits by frightening them with a face as wicked as they were. A fight fire with fire approach.



*“Jack O'Lantern Spectacular” by Lou Oms, Wiki Commons*

## **Evolution of Legend and Practice**

Because Europe's Christian holidays were built on top of the original pagan holidays, new legends and stories were devised to give Christian explanations to the pagan practices still being carried on among the peasantry. This was true in Britain and also on the mainland European continent.

This is one major stumbling block to finding the true origins of our holiday customs. The Church was so effective at masking the truth with their smoke and mirrors that even today many "history" documentaries trace holiday origins to legends of Catholic saints instead of digging deeper for the true story which was usurped by the religious tale.

This is most prominent with articles and documentaries about Santa Claus. We see stories about the Catholic Saint Nicholas which barely mention the previous mythological origins of Santa Claus, such as his relation to Odin and other Northern European shamanic figures. The true figure of Yuletide was so threatening to the Church, and apparently the Nativity Story was not powerful enough to drown it out, that they created

a new story about a figure called Saint Nicholas who was superimposed on top of Odin (and Odin's regional variants).

And, if you believe that stories about Catholic saints are based in fact, I urge you to consult your nearest medievalist about the genre of hagiography (saints' lives).



*Vintage Halloween Postcard*

## **Enter Stingy Jack**

Halloween fared better than other seasonal holidays. Although the Catholic holidays of All Saints Day and All Hallows Eve were superimposed over Samhain, they have now faded into obscurity apart from a minority of devout Catholic practitioners, while Halloween has grown into a wildly popular holiday with clear pagan connotations.

There is no singular Catholic saint claiming ownership of this holiday, or acting as a figure head, in the way Saint Nicholas usurped Yule and Saint Brigid usurped Imbolc (which was turned into Candlemas), and neither were stories of the life of Christ cut and pasted on top of it, as was done with Yuletide and Easter. Perhaps this was the loophole that allowed Halloween to stand fast like a beacon from ancient times.

But, All Hallows Eve did develop its own Christian legends, they were just of less epic proportions than the ones given to other holidays. As Samhain became All Hallow's Eve, the Jack O'Lantern was placed within a Christian context in the legend of Stingy Jack.



*The Turnip Lantern, 1838 by William Henry Hunt*

## **The Tale of Stingy Jack**

This story has many variations, but they share the general gist. Stingy Jack was not a spirit, but rather a miserly drunkard. Jack had an aversion to paying for his booze, and so he duped others into buying his drinks. He became so good at his ruse that the Devil himself was bamboozled by Jack.

Well, the Devil isn't exactly known for his charity, so he turned himself into a coin with which Jack could buy his ale under the condition that Jack's soul belonged to him. Imagine the Devil's surprise when he was foiled by Jack! This sneaky drunk was smarter than he looked. Jack placed the coin inside his pocket where it rubbed against a small silver crucifix. The power of the cross negated Satan's contract and the Devil had to swear never to let Jack's soul enter Hell.

But, the last laugh was on Jack. Because of his philandering and wicked ways, God also refused Jack entry into Heaven. So, Jack's soul was doomed to eternally wander the Earth. Mocking him, the Devil tossed a burning ember that would never burn out which landed at Jack's feet.

Making the best of the situation, Jack carved out a turnip and placed the ember inside creating a lantern to light his way as he wandered for ever more, always searching for his final resting place.



*Stingy Jack by Vasilios Markousis, 2015*



## Analysis

The Legend of Stingy Jack may not usurp Halloween with the same ferocity as other Christianized holiday legends spread by the Church to hijack other pre-Christian holidays, but it did give an explanation for the widespread custom of the Jack O'Lantern which fell within a Christian dichotomy of good and evil.

It introduces God and the Devil as characters who determine Jack's fate. Just when Jack thinks he got away with his trickery, it is God who gets the last laugh.

The intended lesson is that if you dabble with evil, you will pay for it. And, of course, the Old Ways upon which Halloween customs are based were considered evil by the Church.



*Vintage Halloween Card*

## **Weeding Legitimate History from Bogus**

When weeding through the evidence to determine what is legitimate vs. bogus information, try to take what is being presented and place it in context with what you already know to be true to see if this piece fits within the larger picture.

Using this critical technique makes the Legend of Stingy Jack so very interesting because it fits within the established framework of what we know about Halloween. We know that it was a pagan high day turned into a Christian one. We also know that our other holidays went through the same transformation. This is common knowledge by now. Most modern Christians do understand that Jesus was not born on December 25<sup>th</sup> (some scholars estimate a September birth).

So, when mass media television programs or articles on the internet attempt to explain the roots of a holiday known to have pagan origins by suggesting it originated as a Christian legend, stop and think about whether that makes sense. Does it make sense for the origin of the Jack O'Lantern to come from this Christian Stingy Jack tale? Or does it make more sense that this tale was spun to take

the emphasis off of pagan origins and give it a Christian meaning?

And, the next time you see a History Channel documentary on Santa Claus, stop to do the same analysis. Does it really make sense for the Church to take the emphasis away from Jesus' birth by elevating a saint? Or does it make more sense for the Church to be frustrated that pagan Yule traditions continued to be practiced by the commoners and so they invented a holiday figure to distract them?



*Vintage Halloween Card*

### **3 The Familiar Spirit: Companion to Witches**

#### **What is a Familiar?**

The “familiar spirit” is a common motif found in both folklore and witch trial records of the witch hunt era.

The term is said to be derived from the Latin *famulus*, which means servant, due to the familiar’s role of serving the witch to whom it was attached. Familiars served as an attendant to the witch, providing such functions as protection and guidance, to teach the witch magical and healing arts, or in the case of bad witches, to do their bidding engaging in sinister deeds.

In popular media today, the familiar is almost always represented as an animal, and usually the black cat. Film and television programs often portray the familiar as a corporeal animal, more akin to a pet or companion, who aids the witch in their magic. However, the familiar found in folklore and witch trial records often existed very much in the spirit realm, hence the name “familiar spirit.” In his encyclopedia on the witch hunt era

William E. Burns insists that familiars were never real animals, but always strictly a spirit.



*A witch by Ida Rentoul Outhwaite*

But, folklorist Katharine Briggs disagrees. In her book, “Nine Lives: The Folklore of Cats,” Briggs explains the type of elderly person that was frequently accused of witchcraft often lived alone with his or her pets. Due to the loneliness of a solitary old age, this type of person would no doubt dote on their animals more than what was common in society during that period.

In her own encyclopedia on fairies and spirits, Carol Rose says that simply having a pet in the home of an accused witch, in some cases, could be considered proof of their guilt.

Whether spirit or corporeal, the familiar was not always an animal. Other times the spirit took the shape of a human, or was even known to be the ghost of a deceased person who now resided in Fairy Land. (In British folklore, there is a mingling of ghosts, fairies, fairy land, and the realm of the dead). The deceased might have been someone known to the witch, or it might well have been a complete stranger.

Familiar spirits could also be fairies, or other folkloric creatures such as the hobgoblin, who were in the service of the witch whom they served.



*Artwork by Jennie Harbour*

## **Where Were They Found?**

Though familiars were common in many areas, they were not universally known in all regions. They are found with high frequency in the folklore of England, Scotland, and the Basque region of Spain.

Familiars most often took the shape of animals in England and Basque, but in Scotland familiars could appear as either human or animal and usually with a strong connection to the fairy realm.

The types of animals that familiars appeared as were usually creatures that would be commonly known to peasants. So, we see familiar spirits taking the shape of domestic animals such as dogs and cats frequently. But, they also appeared as animals that were present in the landscape. The toad is one such common manifestation.

Familiars appeared as toads in England and Scotland, but in Basque the toad is the most common form of familiar, and much folklore developed around this motif. Basque toad familiars were typically described as wearing clothes. They retained a place of honor in the witch's household, and were thought to be especially powerful.





*"Moonlit Dreams" by Gabriel Ferrier*

In this way, there seems to be some overlap in traditions of the domestic spirit. The domestic spirit is commonly remembered today as the house elf, or brownie, but could take many forms in old European folklore.

We see the Basque toad familiar being propitiated with food offerings in the same way that domestic spirits were often given offerings of food in return for the services that they provided. England developed a very rich tradition of the familiar spirit in their folklore and witch trial records. English familiars could appear as the aforementioned animals, but also as ferrets, weasels, rodents, rabbits, or insects. The spirit might be passed down from parent to child in a family of witches, or it was often reported to be gifted to the witch by a power powerful spirit in the otherworld.



*Vintage Halloween card*

## **Familiars as Demons**

Because fairy lore was so aggressively demonized by the Church, fairies became equated with demons. Thus, the folkloric rulers of the fairies were often conflated with the devil, or seen to be in league with him.

Therefore, we see some witches receiving their familiars from the fairy king or queen, and others from the devil himself. For this reason, familiar spirits were often equated with demons by witch hunters.

Carol Rose says that “in Wales, familiars are mostly demons who are usually invisible” (Rose, 113). This tradition of invisible demonic familiars appears to be unique to Wales, and may be a result of prodding by witch interrogators rather than any real folkloric belief.

## **Possible Shamanic Connections**

It is my opinion that animal familiars may serve a similar function in folk belief that we see entities such as spirit animals, power animals,

totems, spirit guides, and so forth, fill in other cultures. In fact, the modern conception of a spirit guide is quite similar to a guardian angel, and Carol Rose makes the analogy of an attendant familiar spirit with the role of a guardian angel in her encyclopedia.

There are many scholars today who have developed a very strong case for the theory that a minority of accused witches may have been engaging in ancient shamanic practices carried over from the pre-Christian era. This does not apply to all, or even most, of the accused, as we know that witch interrogators would elicit confessions with the use of torture and tell the victim precisely what to confess. However, there are some anomalies.



*Vintage Halloween card*

For example, Italian scholar Carlo Ginzburg has studied the Benandanti, or “good walkers,” a group of accused witches from the Friuli region of Italy. The region of Friuli had its own dialect that was distinct from the other Italian dialects, which protected them from the witch trials for a very long time, as there were no inquisitors who could speak their language.

When they eventually got around to interrogating them, the inquisitors were astounded by what the Benandanti confessed to – because none of it was found in their witch hunting manuals! When the confessions do not match the witch hunters’ manuals, this is one clue that their practices were not fed to them by the interrogators.

Among the things the Benandanti confessed to was the practice of going into trance to journey to the spirit world to engage in spirit battles to protect their village’s crops from malevolent spirits that sought to sabotage their harvest.

Carlo Ginzburg discusses his theories, and even expands his discussion to other parts of Europe including German speaking regions and Lowland Scotland in his books, “Ecstasies: Deciphering the Witches' Sabbath” and “The Night

Battles: Witchcraft and Agrarian Cults in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries."



*Riding Witches by Otto Goetze, 1924*

Emma Wilby is a British scholar who has found similar conclusions in her research into Scottish witch trials. Wilby discusses accused witches' use of trance, and other shamanic techniques, to engage in otherworldly travel and interactions with spirits in the other world.

Both familiars and the fairy realm are discussed in depth in Wilby's books, "The Visions of Isobel Gowdie: Magic, Witchcraft and Dark Shamanism in Seventeenth-Century Scotland" and "Cunning-Folk and Familiar Spirits: Shamanistic Visionary Traditions in Early Modern British Witchcraft and Magic."

The theory that some accused witches were using shamanic practices is briefly touched on in "Scottish Fairy Belief" by Lizanne Henderson and Edward J. Cowan. They mention another scholar by the name of Eva Pocs whose research on witchcraft and the fairy tradition in Hungary and Southwest Europe has produced findings very similar to Ginzburg's and Wilby's.

So, we see that there is strong scholarly support for theory that a minority of witches may have been carrying on traditions that originated in the pagan landscape of ancient pre-Christian Europe. Their familiars are often intermediaries to



the spirit world. Familiars are often the beings who teach healing or magical powers to the witch.

This is not unlike the role of animal guides that we see in other shamanic cultures, or even in modern neo-pagan and new age beliefs. And, indeed, Carol Rose mentions many worldwide cultures with folkloric tales of familiar-like entities in her encyclopedia.

Many of the cultures she names have historically shamanic traditions, such as the Saami, Native American, Australian Aborigine, and Siberian cultures. Of the Siberian tradition, she says “In Siberia the Familiar is known as a Yakeela, which may be required to combat the Familiar of an adversary shaman” (Rose, 113). This sounds strikingly similar to the practice of spirit battles of the Benandanti described above.



*Vintage Halloween card*



## **Folklore and Popular Religion**

To conclude, it's important to mention that from the Middle Ages into the Renaissance, and indeed, in many cases even into modern times, the beliefs held by the populace are often vastly different than what they ought to believe when going by the standards of the powers that be.

In other words, if you were to ask “what religion were the people of Scotland in the second half of the 16th century?” Protestant Christianity would be the correct answer. However, this would not correctly reflect the beliefs of the common folk, especially among the peasantry.

The rural people hung on to “the old religion,” which was Catholicism, for many years after the Reformation. And that old religion was infused with many beliefs that were retained from the far older religion, indigenous polytheism.

Popular religion, therefore, is what is actually being practiced by the people vs. what the official religion preached at the pulpit teaches. And, it is usually a rich mix of influences from all of the above. You see this very plainly today in Central and South America, where there is a fascinating merging of native beliefs and Catholicism. The

same phenomenon happened many centuries earlier in Europe.

The tradition of the familiar spirit, like most folk traditions, retained elements of a pagan origin while it also assumed Christian ideas that were either organically infused or superimposed upon it by secular and religious authorities. This mix of influences is what makes folklore a fascinating, but sometimes challenging, topic to explore.

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## **4 When Brownies Turn Bad**

### **Tutelary Spirits**

Brownies are creatures found in the folklore of Scotland and England. Although Brownies appear in Highland lore, they are more commonly found in the Lowlands and Northern England. They fall within the category of a domestic tutelary spirit.

Tutelary spirits are guardians, and they can be found in many world traditions protecting people, property, or even as a patron deity of a city. Brownies fall into the category that protects property.

### **Germanic House Elves**

While creatures like the Brownie are found in Celtic folklore, they are much less common than in Germanic folk tradition which is the culture more heavily prominent in Lowland Scotland. In fact,

many old folklore books that separate folklore by culture place Lowland Scotland under the

Germanic category and Highland Scotland under Celtic. This understanding has been lost today largely due to many political factors in the late 18th and early 19th century which caused countries to choose one cultural identity at the expense of their other subcultures in addition to both anti-German and anti-English sentiment.



*Brownie, by Arthur Rackham*

Brownies are an excellent piece of evidence for Germanic tradition in Scotland as they are a perfect match to other Germanic folkloric creatures such as the Kobold of Germany and the Tomte and Nisse of Scandinavia.

Similar spirits are found all across Europe, but they are especially strong in Germanic folk tradition. This is just one way in which Lowland Scotland remained close to its Germanic Anglo-Saxon roots.

## **Celtic vs Germanic Tradition**

It has been noted that the Fae in Celtic tradition are much more sinister and untrustworthy compared to the more helpful spirits found within Germanic tradition. For instance, Celtic tradition usually advises people never to eat any food that is offered by the Sidhe, as sipping their wine might trap you in fairy land.

Conversely, Germanic tradition encourages people to eat any food offered by the elves, for to deny it would cause offense but accepting it would gain favor which would lead to blessings.

In Celtic folklore, fairies often give a gift that appears valuable, such as a pot of gold, only to cause frustration when it changes into a pile of dead leaves. The opposite occurs in Germanic folklore where a gift that looks worthless, such as a pile of twigs, will turn into something of great value provided the person is worthy and accepts the gift with gratitude.



*Elves by Arthur Rackham*

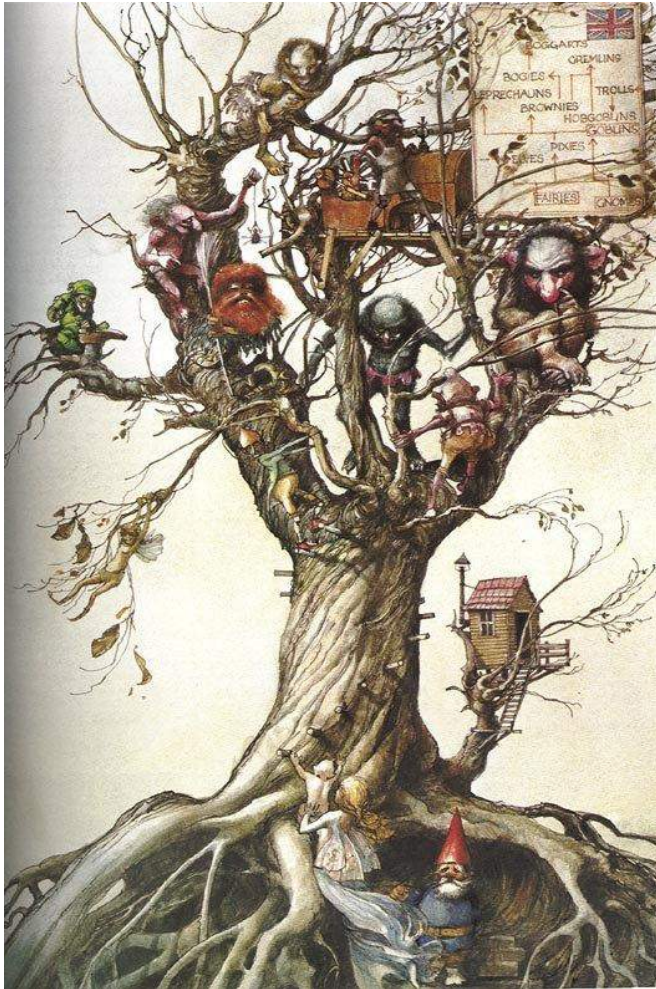
However, there are some similarities between the two folkloric belief systems. Both cultures were likely much more similar to each other in their pre-historic origins. The Celtic Sidhe and the Germanic Elves both trace their earliest origins to ancestral guardian spirits associated with burial mounds.

And this heritage is directly tied to beliefs in house-elves such as the Brownie. In Germanic culture, the spirit of the original owner of a homestead was believed to remain on the land as a guardian spirit to each subsequent generation. Eventually house-elves began to be considered more as helpers around the house and property.

Another similarity between Celtic and Germanic belief is the notion that elves and fairies must be treated with respect. They were believed to take offense easily, and woe betide to the person who offended the Fae. Although Brownies and other house elves were known as good spirits, they could also be quite troublesome if not treated properly.

Most folktales simply describe Brownies packing up and leaving, taking their luck and good fortune with them, when they have been offended by someone on the property. Although this doesn't sound especially malevolent, it had dire

consequences for the household. A once prosperous farm could quickly sink into despair without the luck that Brownies carry as well as the extra help these little worker elves performed.



*Various elf species, by Arthur Rackham*



## On the Homestead

When Brownies were thought to be helping one homestead, neighbors whose farms were not doing as well often blamed their lack of prosperity on the neighbor whose success was attributed to his Brownie. This theme is also found in Scandinavian folklore. The Brownie, Tomte, Nisse, or Kobold was believed to steal milk from the neighbor's cattle or drag bags of grain from the neighbor's farm to his own. A farmer who was thought to have such a spirit on his property could be the target of anger or even accusations of witchcraft by his neighbors.



*Tomte stealing hay from a neighbor by  
Gudmund Stenersen*

During periods of strong religious fervor Brownies were equated with demons. This was especially true during the Reformation period when Protestant reformers were much less tolerant of folk beliefs. So anyone found propitiating a domestic spirit could be accused of worshipping devils.

As you may recall from folk stories, house elves are particularly fond of common food such as porridge and dairy. Indeed, our own tradition of leaving an offering of cookies and milk out for that jolly old elf who visits on Christmas Eve has strong ties to Germanic elf tradition.

Failure to propitiate the Brownie who works on your homestead could anger the household elf. Many stories are told of prosperous families who slide into destitution after being abandoned by their Brownie.



*Tomte by Jenny Nyström*

## **Angry Brownies and Poltergeist**

But, sometimes the situation could become much worse. If a Brownie was especially angered, he might do much more than abandon a homestead; he might decide to haunt it. In fact, occurrences that have often be described as poltergeist activity were sometimes attributed to an angry Brownie.

Claude Lecouteux is a French scholar and prolific author who researches the historical folk beliefs of Europe. He literally wrote the book (the only book I can find, and I have looked!) on domestic spirits, “The Tradition of Household Spirits.”

Although the term Brownie refers specifically to the Lowland Scottish creature, Lecouteux uses the word as a blanket term to refer to house elves in many European regions. He observes that in European folklore “the dead transformed into spirits, then into sprites or Brownies, and eventually into devils” (p. 171).

He goes on to describe haunted houses that have been recorded in French and German historical documents that he interprets as unhappy Brownies. These accounts span hundreds of years

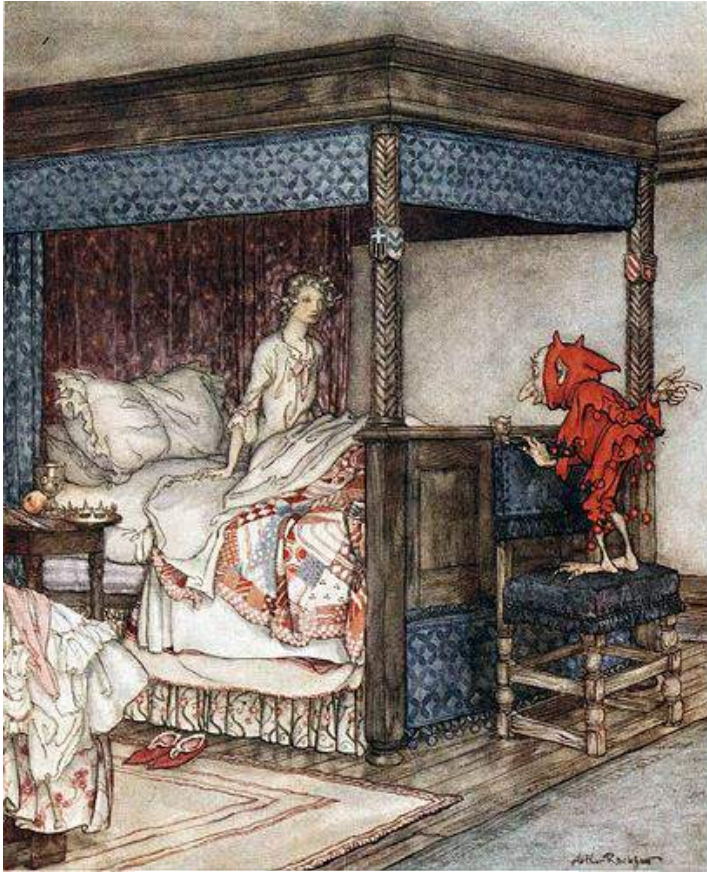
going back to the 14th century, and each one sounds strikingly like modern horror films based on hauntings and demonic possessions. He describes stones being hurled through the air, pages of books flipping from beginning to end with lightning speed, the sound of heavy wooden shoes thumping through the house when no one else is home. One particular account described a huge dark hand reaching down through the chimney.

These events occurred in Britain as well. Two encyclopedias on fairies contain entries that corroborate Lecouteux's interpretation of poltergeist activity. "Encyclopedia of Fairies" by Katharine Briggs and "Spirits, Fairies, Leprechauns, and Goblins" by Carol Rose are both exhaustive reference books written by respected scholars.

Both volumes contain a reference for the Boggart, which is a creature found in the English North Country region. The Boggart is considered to be a like a Brownie, but an especially mischievous one.

It can sometimes function like the typical helpful Brownie, but it often displays characteristics of a poltergeist. The Boggart may work hard doing household chores only

occasionally playing pranks on the family who lives there. But if he is angered, the Boggart is particularly vicious in his response, even being known to completely destroy the entire farm.



*A brownie by Arthur Rackham*

## Celtic Variants

Although the house-elf type creatures are especially common in Germanic lore, as stated above, they do appear with less frequency in Celtic lore as well. There are two Welsh equivalents of the Brownie called the Bwca and the Bwbachod. The Bwbachod has a special dislike for teetotalers and ministers, and stories are told of this creature tormenting ministers with all manner of pranks.

On the Isle of Man, the Fenoderee is their version of a Brownie. It shares similar characteristics as the typical house-elf, but it is known to be exceptionally large, hairy, ugly, and possessing incredible strength. Like other house-elves, care must be taken not to offend the Fenoderee.

One story describes a Manx farmer who criticized his Fenoderee's grass cutting, observing that the grass was not trimmed short enough. The Fenoderee responded by raising tree roots all over the farmer's property which nearly caused the poor farmer to ruin his legs as he stumbled across his land.

You must also take care never to give a set of clothes to a Fenoderee, for just like the Brownies,

they take great offense to this and will abandon anyone who does so.

## **Care and Feeding of Your Brownie**

So, what is the protocol to keep your own Brownie happy? There are some rules of thumb that tend to show up often in the folklore:

- Brownies and other house elves tend to enjoy a neat and tidy house. They will help you with chores, but they will be annoyed if the household is not clean.
- Never spy on a Brownie. There are many tales of people who hid themselves in the room where they expected the Brownie to be busy working that evening just to get a glimpse. Usually this is not done with bad intentions, simply out of curiosity. But, the Brownie nearly always discovers the human and leaves the premises in a huff, never to return.
- Just as in Harry Potter, giving your house-elf a set of clothes is his license to take off. J.K. Rowling did not come up with that on her own, it is heavily documented in the

folklore. However, the house-elves of folk tradition are not slaves like the ones in the Harry Potter series. They can come and go as they please. A gift of clothes is not necessarily a nullification of contractual slavery, as Rowling depicts, but simply a great insult.



*A sleepy elf by Arthur Rackham*



- Feed your Brownie well and often. One reason Brownies are frequently angered in the folk tales is when the family they serve forgets to feed them, or feeds them milk that has gone sour. Nothing makes a Brownie more annoyed than sour milk!
- Have pets and be good to them. Brownies are often depicted as having friendships with domestic animals. One particular story described the Brownie being bonded to a horse rather than to a property or family. When the horse was sold, the Brownie went with him. The Brownie blessed whomever was good to the horse and cursed those who were cruel to her.



*Brownies on a vintage advertisement*

Anyone who studies historical fairy belief already knows to tread carefully when dealing with wights. The notion of the pretty, tiny, whimsical little fairy is a very recent invention. Our ancestors knew well that elves and fairies possessed the ability to grant great gifts or cause great harm.

Brownies are especially depicted as benign helper spirits. And, according to the lore, they absolutely are. But, they are also sensitive creatures who display strong emotion. Crossing a Brownie could be the worst mistake you ever make.

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## **5 *Hop-tu-Naa*: Halloween on the Isle of Man**

### **The Isle of Man**

The Isle of Man, or Mann, is located in the Irish Sea nestled between Ireland, Scotland, and England. It has a long history of human habitation since pre-historic times. Today it is part of Great Britain, but also remains self-governing.

Because of its strong Gaelic heritage, the Isle of Man is recognized as one of the six Celtic Nations by the Celtic League (some consider there to be seven, but Galicia is not recognized by the Celtic League).

Strong community usage of a Celtic language within recent memory is one important criteria of acceptance into the Celtic League (which is what disqualifies Galicia). The Celtic language historically spoken in Mann is called Manx. The term Manx is also used to describe anything that comes from the Island.

Like other islands in the region, Man also shares some Norse heritage due to Viking

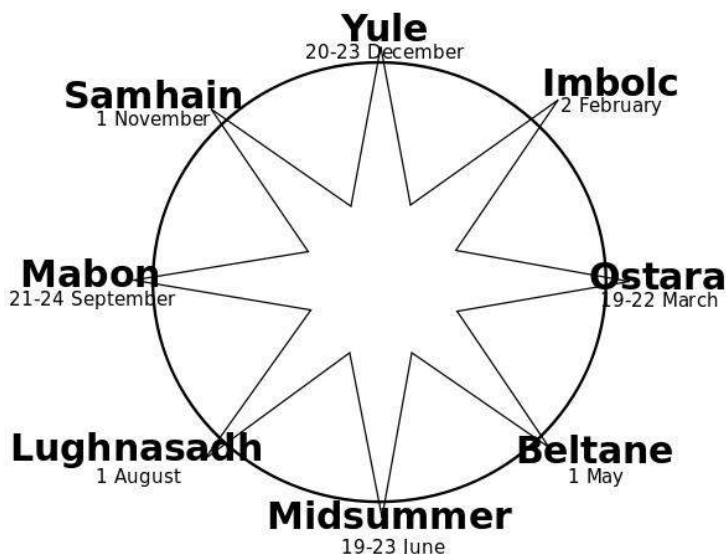
settlement and Norse rule in the early Middle Ages. So some of the customs and folklore of the region retain unique flavor from a combination of cultural influences. The Isle is home to a large collection of both Celtic and Norse stone crosses carved with the knot work both cultures are famous for.



*Map of the British Isles with the Isle of Man in red*

## October 31<sup>st</sup> & Ancient Fire Festivals

Bonfires have been an age old tradition during Celtic festivals for centuries. Although, the Celts certainly did not invent the invocation of flames at pagan gatherings. Bonfires were common at seasonal festivals all around Europe very likely dating to Neolithic times and continuing into the Modern Era. The Celts are most famous for their bonfires that occurred on Beltane (May 1st, May Day) and Samhain (October 31st, Halloween).



*"The Wheel of the Year," a Neo-pagan calendar of holidays inspired by Celtic and Germanic pre-Christian high days*

Halloween evolved from Samhain. While this is mostly true, this explanation neglects to explain that October 31st was a festival time for peoples all around Europe, not just the Celts. Not only that, but not all Celts called their October 31st festival Samhain. There could be variations of spelling and pronunciation, or a completely different name all together. And as time advanced, new names and customs could eclipse the old.

The truth is that most of the Indo-European people, from which the Celts, Germanic, Slavic, and most European groups descend, celebrated many of their festivals at the same times as each other, apart from agricultural festivals which would vary from year to year based on the growing cycle.



*Midsummer bonfire, by Trzypiece Wiki Commons*

## Hop-tu-Naa

The origins of *Hop-tu-Naa* on the Isle of Man are a bit of a mystery, and there is very little written on it. A book called "The Folklore of the Isle of Man" by Margaret Killip gives more information than what is available on the internet. She explains that while some of the customs of Hop-tu-Naa coincide with Samhain (spelled Sauin by Killip), many others are unique to the island.

The term Hop-tu-Naa is speculated to come from the Gaelic phrase *Shoh ta'n Oie*, meaning "this is the night." I can't help but notice a similarity in sound and syntax with the Shetland Island festival of *Up-Helly-Aa*. Similarity of sound does not necessarily imply a relationship. But, both islands lie outside the coast of Scotland, and both have a history of mixed heritage between the Celts and Norse.

Another point of interest is the custom of Trick or Treating in relation to Hop-tu-Naa. Although we know that the custom was brought to America by Scots-Irish immigrants, the ancestor of the trick-or-treating custom apparently withered out in its homelands while it flourished in America, and was only recently re-introduced to

Britain. Indeed, many modern day journalists in Britain and Ireland have referred to it as an American custom, and it is reported to have only become popular in these countries the past twenty years or so.

How curious, then, that trick-or-treating among Manx children is described by Ms. Killip in her book, published in 1975! Halloween was also referred to as Hollantide Eve on the Isle of Man, and Killip explains that the children went door to door carrying their carved turnip lanterns singing the *Oie Hounney* song about Jinny the Witch.



*Vintage Halloween Card*



I think it is important to point out two things here. Firstly, ancient customs continue on much longer in rural, isolated communities such as the Isle of Man. Secondly, new customs from foreign lands catch on much later in rural and isolated communities than they do in metropolitan areas, especially in the days before the internet and cable television brought world cultures in such immediate contact with each other. Therefore, it seems very likely to me that trick-or-treating on the Isle of Man (although they may not have called it by that name) as reported in Margaret Killip's book, is more likely to be directly related to ancient Celtic customs of the region, and *not* an American import, whereas some other parts of Britain have been re-introduced to the custom by way of American influence.

## **The Hop-tu-Naa Song**

Manx children have been singing the Hop-tu-Naa song for so long that no one is quite sure how old it is. The lyrics describe the night as one of cattle slaughter and feasting, which hearkens back to another universal aspect of the October 31st festival around northern Europe.

The dark and dreary months of winter in northern climes were associated with malicious spirits. Animals were brought indoors to protect them from whatever evil could be lurking. Early November was slaughtering season. Large herds could not be fed through the long winters, and sick or elderly animals would not survive the cold. So it was time to thin the herd and keep the most healthy and hearty. And, of course, whenever there was a slaughter there would also be a feast.



*Vintage Halloween Card*

This custom is reflected in the first lines of the Hop-tu-Naa Song:

*This is old Hollantide night; Hop-tu-naa.*

*The moon shines bright; Trol-la-laa*

*Cock of the hens; Hop-tu-naa.*

*Supper of the heifer; Trol-la-laa*

*Which heifer shall we kill? Hop-tu-naa.*

*The little speckled heifer. Trol-la-laa*

The end of the song is reminiscent of trick-or-treating rhymes rehearsed by American children over the past 100 years:

*If you are going to give us anything, give it us  
soon,*

*Or we'll be away by the light of the moon.*

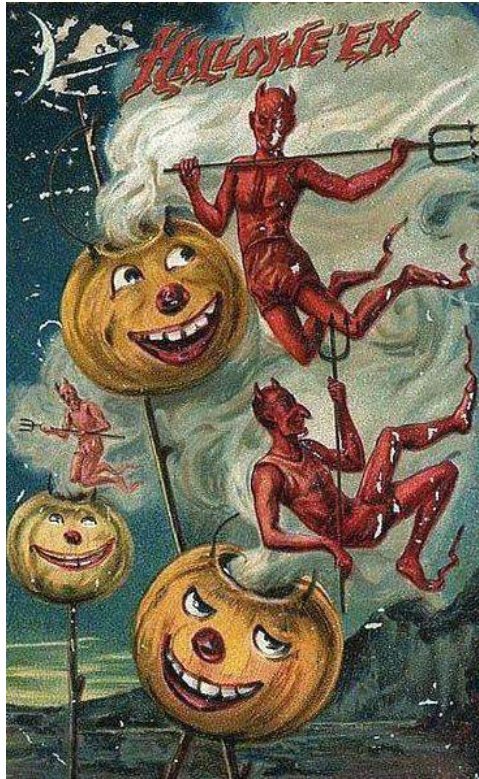
## **Jinny the Witch & Other Folklore**

Some regional variations on the Hop-tu-Naa song briefly mention a figure called Jinny the Witch. In other versions, the entire song is about her. As it turns out, Jinny was a real person. Her name was Joney Lowney and she was tried for witchcraft on the Isle of Man in 1715. Like many witchcraft trial victims, the accusation was hurled at her due to an altercation with a neighbor, not because of any act of malice on her part. Probably due to the late date (the witch craze in Europe was over by this point) and also due to the cultural climate of the island, Jinny was not killed and given a comparatively light sentence.

Although she may not have been very sinister in real life, Jinny the Witch has grown into a frightening character and quintessential part of Manx modern day Hop-tu-Naa celebration.

Other age old customs of Hop-tu-Naa included baking Saddag Valloo, or Dumb Cake. It was thus named because it would have to be eaten in silence. The custom of "dumb supper" appears to have also been present on mainland Scotland. The Oxford Index contains an entry on this custom as well.

Today, Hop-tu-Naa continues to be celebrated on the Isle of Man. Although, sadly, just as in America, the custom of going door to door seems to be dwindling in favor of indoor events where children dress up, carve their lanterns, and receive candy. These events are often organized by local town governments or even by large shopping centers. Yet, ancient customs like singing the Hop-tu-Naa song still prevail.



*Vintage Halloween Card*

## **6 Olde World Accounts of Halloween**

Halloween is a fun and festive time of year with roots going back to Old World tradition. While some traditions have faded away, others survived and are still practiced today.

In the old days, both October 31st and November 1st were considered special days. Often the eve before a holiday was the time for raucous revelry while the next morning was the time for solemn church going. Thus, All Hallows Eve (or evening) became Hallowe'en, and then simply Halloween. Of course we know that before it was All Hallows, the celebration was called Samhain (pronounced sow-en), a Celtic pagan high day.

Presented here are some antiquated accounts of Celtic Halloween customs for your reading pleasure.

**Douglas Holms submitted his observations of Halloween customs in Britain and Ireland to the magazine Irish Monthly in October of 1910:**

HALLOWE'EN is the eve of Hallowmas, All Saints' Day, November the First. Much beloved, we know, by the Scots, and provocative of haggis

and whiskey, and other things to which no further reference will be made in this article. It used to be regarded as the occasion when witches and devils and other mischief-making beings were abroad on their baneful midnight errands, or (more pleasantly) one on which those aeronautic folk, the fairies, hold a grand anniversary and are unusually active and unusually propitious.

Fire, apples, nuts, loom large as propitiating instruments. In the North of England it was the custom to dive for apples, or catch at them, suspended from a string, with the mouth only, the hands being tied behind the back. In the burning of nuts, common to the North of England, Ireland and Scotland, propitious omens were sought, largely concerning matrimony. The custom is well described by the poet Gay in his spell:

*Two hazel nuts I threw into the flame,  
Anid to each nut I gave a sweetheart's name.*

*This with the loudest bounce me sore amaz'd,  
That in a flame of brightest colour blaz'd;*

*As blaz'd the nut, so may thy passion grow,  
For 'twas thy nut that did so brightly glow!*

There was the custom common to Scotland and Wales of lighting fires. In some cases they collected the ashes from the consumed fire in the form of a circle. Then a stone was placed near the circumference for every person of each family interested, and whatever stone was out of its place upon the next morning the person represented by that stone was said to be devoted of "fey " and was supposed not to live another year.

And much more you may learn by diligent search among old world customs. "Soul-cakes," too, you ought to make and eat about this time, and perhaps you may lighten the lot of your ancestors in another place. But there, we are getting a little bit out of our depth!



*Vintage Scottish Halloween card*



**Mary Julia MacCulloch explored Halloween customs on the Isle of Skye and mainland Scotland in an article in the journal Folklore, March 1923:**

There are various festivals in the year breaking into the peaceful monotony of the crofters' existence, but the chief of these is Hallowe'en. I do not need to say that this is observed on the 31st of October, the eve of All Saints' Day. I do not also need to say that this Festival coincides with the New Year of the Ancient Celts, the time when the sun dies. It is little wonder that the sun was an object of adoration, for even now, on the broad moors, open and bare, there is little enough of him, and what must it have been when the land was covered with the forests which have helped to form the great peat bogs.

Before Hallowe'en in all the shops there is a great display of masks, or false faces, as they are more usually called in Scotland. This is in the village, for if the country people want them, they have to walk there for them. When the day comes, there is great preparation. All sorts of old garments are produced and there is great dressing up. This is not confined to children, for quite grown-up lads

take part in it. On that night no door is closed against the "guisers." They walk into any house without knocking, and penetrate into its recesses.

I am told that in some parts the lads and young men get very riotous. There is great pulling up of cabbage stalks to see if the future partner for life is to be straight in mind and body. After these are pulled up, the youths run through the townships and play many rough pranks, throwing the cabbage stalks in at house doors, or at the windows which are frequently broken. They are even more daring than the town lads in their raids on combustibles to make the bonfires, and byres and stables are watched lest they be stripped of their woodwork.

The girls visit the churchyard at midnight to try their fortune whether it is to be good or bad. Their future husband's wraiths are expected to appear. Samhain (the Celtic New Year) is mainly observed in the Highlands, but echoes of it linger on in the Lowlands. Children, dressed up and with blackened faces, still come round to the doors of the houses. I wonder whether the masks are the survival of the disguising themselves as animals which was practised by the ancient Celts in the orgiastic rites at Samhain. The children in Fife used to sing:

*This is the nicht o' Hallowe'en  
A' the witches are to be seen,*

*Some o' them black, an' some o' them green,  
And some o' them like a randy queen!*



*Halloween Greeting Card featuring  
divination or scrying with a mirror, 1904*

**Last but not least, Ruth Edna Kelley published The Book of Hallowe'en in 1919. Unfortunately it presents some outdated misinformation, such as the notion that the Celts honored Middle Eastern god Ba'al on Samhain. Equating Northern European deities with Mediterranean gods was a common practice at the time but is discouraged by scholars today. However, the book describes some interesting Halloween customs from various Celtic regions and presents many traditional tales and poems:**

Ireland has a literature of Hallowe'en, or "Samhain," as it used to be called. Most of it was written between the seventh and the twelfth centuries, but the events were thought to have happened while paganism still ruled in Ireland.

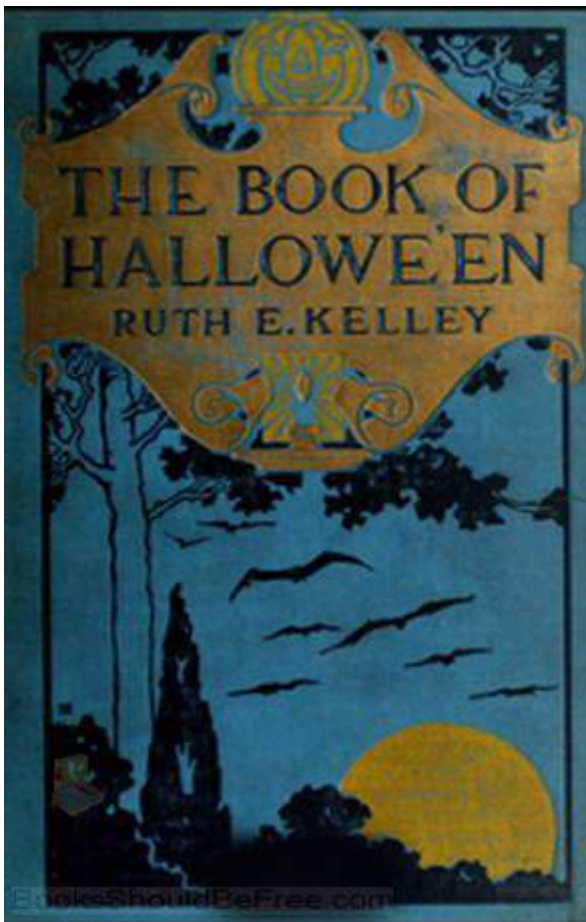
The evil powers that came out at Samhain lived the rest of the time in the cave of Cruachan in Connaught, the province which was given to the wicked Fomor after the battle of Moytura. This cave was called the "hell-gate of Ireland," and was unlocked on November Eve to let out spirits and copper-colored birds which killed the farm animals. They also stole babies, leaving in their place changelings, goblins who were old in wickedness while still in the cradle, possessing

superhuman cunning and skill in music. One way of getting rid of these demon children was to ill-treat them so that their people would come for them, bringing the right ones back; or one might boil egg-shells in the sight of the changeling, who would declare his demon nature by saying that in his centuries of life he had never seen such a thing before.

Even after Christianity was made the vital religion in Ireland, it was believed that places not exorcised by prayers and by the sign of the cross, were still haunted by Druids. As late as the fifth century the Druids kept their skill in fortune-telling. King Dathi got a Druid to foretell what would happen to him from one Hallowe'en to the next, and the prophecy came true. Their religion was now declared evil, and all evil or at any rate suspicious beings were assigned to them or to the devil as followers.

The power of fairy music was so great that St. Patrick himself was put to sleep by a minstrel who appeared to him on the day before Samhain. The Tuatha De Danann, angered at the renegade people who no longer did them honor, sent another minstrel, who after laying the ancient religious seat Tara under a twenty-three years' charm, burned up the city with his fiery breath.

These infamous spirits dwelt in grassy mounds, called "forts," which were the entrances to underground palaces full of treasure, where was always music and dancing. These treasure-houses were open only on November Eve.



## **7 Lighting the Witches Upon Pendle Hill: A Traditional Tale of Halloween Horror**

*Author's note: The following folktale was found in a book called "Goblin Tales from Lancashire" by James Bowker under the simple title "Allhallow's Night." The book is undated but appears to have been published around the turn of the 19th century.*

*This is my own re-telling, though in trying to remain true to the feel of original I have kept some of the wording close to the original, while altering other areas in order to flow more fluidly to a modern reader. And I have taken only slight artistic liberties, such as giving the farmer's wife a name rather than referring to her as "the wife" throughout.*

*I would also like to point out that the tone used to discuss witches is in keeping with the original "horror story," and it in no way reflects my personal view of witchcraft.*

# Lighting the Witches Upon Pendle Hill:

Carolyn Emerick  
USA

## A Traditional Tale of Halloween Horror



*Pendle Hill, in Lancashire, England. Photo by Dr Greg on Wikimedia Commons*

The massive and majestic structure called Pendle Hill adds a mysterious charm to the beautiful landscape surrounding it. Covered with the green furnishings of moss and fern, the hill brings a sense of the fanciful to onlookers for miles around.

But, most today do not realize that Pendle Hill was once the meeting place of witches who met upon its flat summit to perform their wicked acts of devilry.

The antics of some of these witches were recorded during the witch trial era and remembered as the famous Pendle Witches. Their devious trickery was so disruptive that the area was said to have become quite unsafe for the local residents.



One such resident was a farmer called Ralph who lived with his family in a small cottage not too far from Pendle Hill. With the farmer and his wife, Molly, lived their faithful servant, Isaac, who had been with the family for many years.

The household was quite illiterate, which was common at that time. Living in such a rural area with up to a mile between each household, and not having their imaginations crushed by schooling, such as is the sad case we see today, the family believed wholeheartedly in the legends of boggies and hellish specters that were told in the area, even though they had not had any personal experiences with the supernatural themselves. But, that was soon to change.



*A peasant family on their homestead, by  
Abraham Willemsens*

On a dark and gloomy evening the wind began to howl in a wickedly ominous way. Before long it seemed that a tempest was brewing as the windows and doors rattled in their frames. The wind moaned and shrieked as huge raindrops smashed against the little diamond shaped window frames.

Upon the morrow, three of the farmer's cattle were found lying dead in the cowshed. Not a few days after, two of the farmer's children fell ill. As the edge of darkness crept up the side of Pendle Hill that evening, one of the children succumbed to death. If these misfortunes were not bad enough, the farmer's crops also succumbed to a pestilence, thereby endangering the welfare of the entire household.



*Artwork by Thomas Cole*

At this point, and with great reluctance, the Farmer Ralph had no recourse but to believe that he had somehow offended some wrathful spirit who was enacting revenge upon his household. Though, he did take precautions against these things with the charms and amulets in common use amongst the peasantry.

But, the horseshoe over his door, the branches of ash placed above the cowshed entryway, and the hag stones hanging above his own and his children's beds were apparently no match for whatever powerful magic was afflicting his homestead.

The farmer's household held a family council to discuss why they found themselves so vulnerable to these attacks and what could be done to remedy the situation. The mood around the table was morose, for even their rough old farmhand, Isaac, greatly missed the prattle of the little one whose sudden passing had cast a shadow over the home.

The farmer and his wife lamented the loss of their child and held great trepidation for who in the household might befall the same fate. Knocking the ashes from his pipe, Farmer Ralph spoke up "Well, Isaac. You may as well take horseshoe and

ash branches down for all the good use they seem to be.”



*A typical European peasant family, by  
Adriaen van Ostade*

His sadness had turned to frustration as he banged his down-turned pipe on the table to knock out the remaining cinders. "We've naught been able to keep the feeorin away from us, and I expect only more bad luck clear to November!" the farmer exclaimed.

"Why do you say November, Ralph" asked his wife, Molly, in a terrified voice. She anxiously gazed out the little cottage window where she could see Pendle Hill looming dimly in the distance.

"Because, my lass, on O'Hallow night I intend to climb Pendle Hill to light the witches," Ralph said this with all seriousness, setting his jaw firmly.

"Heaven save us all!" cried his wife.

The three sat in silence for several moments. Finally the quiet was broken by old Isaac who said, "whither the master goes, so Isaac goes with him. There will be two of us, at any rate."

The farmer gratefully accepted Isaac's offer, though Molly tried in vain to make them both abandon their plan. For, it was well known that others in the region had lighted the witches and thereby secured a twelvemonth's immunity from harm. So, why should they not do likewise? If his

fortunes did not turn around, Ralph and his entire household were staring ruin in the face. Therefore his determination to light his unseen enemies grew stronger with each passing day.

Ralph and his household carried on with their daily chores until the last day of October finally arrived. All Hallow's Eve brought with it a weird and misty rain which quite obscured the spooky hill. But, by nightfall the rain had ceased and the huge silhouette of Pendle Hill was again visible. All day long Ralph and Isaac tried their best not to think about what awaited them that evening.



*Mist over Pendle Hill. Photo by Peter Barr,  
Wikimedia Commons*

But, finally the hour arrived when they had to begin their trudge up the haunted hill to find the dreaded ruins where witches from parts all around gathered in their their mysterious and infernal conclave. Now that the sadness from their recent losses had somewhat abated, the two men were overcome by terror of what they were face when they reached Malkin Tower at the hill's summit.

When the old grandfather clock chimed ten, the men rose and prepared for the lighting. Each man grasped a branch of mountain ash, to which they tied several sprigs of bay as a double protection against both lightening and any fiendish stray spirits who might be lurking about. In their other hand, they each carried an unlit candle.

The tearful goodwife, Molly, cried a blessing upon each one, and the old farm dog crept over from the corner of the farmyard to take his place beside the men. Together, the party headed toward Pendle Hill.



*Pendle Hill, in Lancashire, England. Photo by  
Dr Greg on Wikimedia Commons*

The men marched on bravely, stopping only to light their candles with flint, steel, and a box of tinder as they reached the foot of the slope. Presently, with only a few raindrops fallen, the wind died completely casting an ominous ambiance over the place.

As though it, too, were terrified, the old dog uttered a low whine and crept ever closer to his master. Feeling that a storm would soon be upon them, the three began to climb, heading toward the well-known ravine beside the place the witches would gather.

“We'll have a storm, I reckon, Isaac,” said the farmer.

“I'm a'thinkin' myself we'll have nothing less,” the old man replied dryly as he began his climb candle in hand, with his master and the farm dog following just behind.



*Illustration by Leo H. Grindon, 1882*



When they had nearly reached the top of the ravine, a flash of lightening suddenly pierced the darkness and a peal of thunder seemed to shake the earth beneath them!

A weird and unearthly shriek of laughter rang in their ears as a figure shrouded in black flew slowly past them, so close its garments nearly brushed their faces. This was too much for the old farm dog who turned his tale and fled down the hillside, howling in terror as he went.

But the men, undaunted, marched on. Each one carefully shading his candle with the hand which held tight to the branch of ash. At one point, old Isaac stumbled and nearly fell. Frantically Farmer Ralph hollered “do not let the candle go out!”

Thankfully, both men made it within sight of the tower without mishap, each with their lighted candles in hand. And, they arrived not a moment too soon for the infernal revelry had already commenced within.

While light streamed from the tower windows, shrieks of maniacal laughter could be heard even over the roar of the thunder which had begun to pick up. Every now and again a dark figure floated over their heads and whirled into one

of the windows, and the noise became all the louder by the addition of yet another shrill voice.



*Witches flying over the Earth,  
Morris Meredith Williams, 1910*

Both men eager to get away from the place as quickly as possible readily turned their backs to the tower to start back for the homestead. But no sooner had they turned away when a Satanic face with gleaming red eyes flashed before them and then vanished! Instantly both of their candles went out.

“God's blessing help us now!” both men cried in unison. Before they had even finished their sentence the tower was plunged into total darkness. The shrieks of unholy laughter were suddenly quiet, and the only sound to be heard was the rapid flight of the hags and their familiars. The men's cry had broken up their gathering. More frightened than ever by loss of their lights, the men clung tenaciously to their branches as they hurried away.

They had not gone far in the direction they guessed the farm lay when Farmer Ralph, who was just a little ahead of Isaac, let out a cry. He had slipped and fell, vanishing from Isaac's view, falling down the cliff which Isaac was now standing on the edge of.

Isaac trembled as he peered down into the blackness looking for Ralph. But not one sound came up to tell the old man that his master had escaped with his life, despite the shouts that Isaac sent down after him.



*Illustration by HJ Ford*

Desperately Isaac called for his master, but eventually he turned away thinking the worst must have happened. His goal now was to reach the farm and return with assistance.

However, after wandering for some time in the raging storm which nearly blinded him by the lightening, the weary old fellow pulled himself under a large stone for shelter to wait out the rain. Quite exhausted from the climb in the wet cold, not to mention the fright, old Isaac quickly fell asleep.

As soon as the first faint rays of sunlight kissed the hillside than Isaac was awoken by the old farm dog licking his face! Isaac opened his eyes and gazed about in sleepy astonishment as some men appeared climbing the hill in pursuit of the dog.

Poor Molly had been quite terrified when the howling dog appeared at the door alone whilst the “lighters” failed to show. So, she made her way to the nearest farm house and woke up the neighbors. No sooner had she shared the story than a party of sturdy fellows had assembled to search for the missing men. Isaac explained where he had last seen Ralph, and soon after the rescuers found him as well, down the gorge nursing a broken leg.

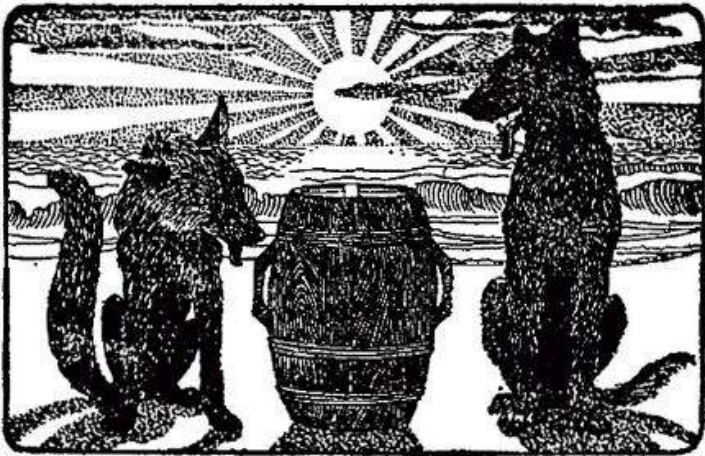


*Illustration by H. R. Millar, circa 1900*

Goodwife Molly let out such great rejoicings when the cavalcade finally returned to the farm. As bad as matters were, she had expected a much worse ending. Afterwards, the homestead experienced great prosperity and the household was blessed far beyond that which they had ever dreamed.

Every now and again Molly would say to Ralph, “you might have kept those candles to light your own home. For it wasn't even midnight before the Devil blew them out!” A joke that invariably caused both Farmer Ralph and old Isaac to break into a smile that bordered on a grimace.

But, the homestead was happy and prosperous evermore, including the farm dog and *his* wife.



*Illustration by Morrish Meredith Williams, 1910*

## 8 Scotland's Haunted Castles

Scotland is a nation rich in folkloric tradition. Both the highlands and the lowlands preserved distinct cultural folk tradition with influences from Gaelic, Anglo-Saxon, and Norse influences. These cultures, along with the unique landscape and climate of this hilly northern country, fused to give Scottish folklore a unique flavor. Stories of ghosts and spirits are one common feature of Scottish lore.

In fact, in his book *Scottish Folklore*, author Raymond Lamont-Brown says “When the early Christian missionaries came to Scotland they found a land they deemed full of spirits and demons.



*And old photocrom print of Dunskey Castle,  
circa 1890-1900.*



The Irish saint Adamnan (c.625-704), Abbot of Iona, tells us so in his *Life of Saint Columba*” (Lamont-Brown, 32). Although these missionaries canvased and converted the Celtic people very early in the Middle Ages, much earlier than the rest of Northern Europe, these beliefs in spirits lingered on far into the modern era.

The land is dotted with numerous castles, many of which harbor dark histories. Combine that with the misty atmosphere of a notoriously superstitious culture, and it is no wonder that tales of haunted castles are abundant in Scotland.

J. Maxwell Wood explores Scotland’s rich folklore tradition in her book “Witchcraft and Superstitious Record in the South-Western District of Scotland,” published in 1911. Since this book is in the public domain, it is available for free online (see link at the end), and we can freely reprint sections. Here is an excerpt in which the author describes the ghostly piper of Dunskey Castle:

*Traversing from Western Galloway to Eastern Dumfriesshire, gleaning as we go, the legend connected with Dunskey Castle, which yet in ruined solitude stands sentinel over the rock-bound shore and restless sea at Portpatrick, first calls for mention.*

*The story goes back to the occupation of the Castle in the fourteenth century by Walter de Curry, a turbulent sea rover, who, becoming much incensed at the outspoken and fearless utterances of an Irish piper whom he had taken prisoner and compelled to his service as minstrel and jester, condemned the unfortunate man to a lingering death from starvation in the Castle dungeons.*

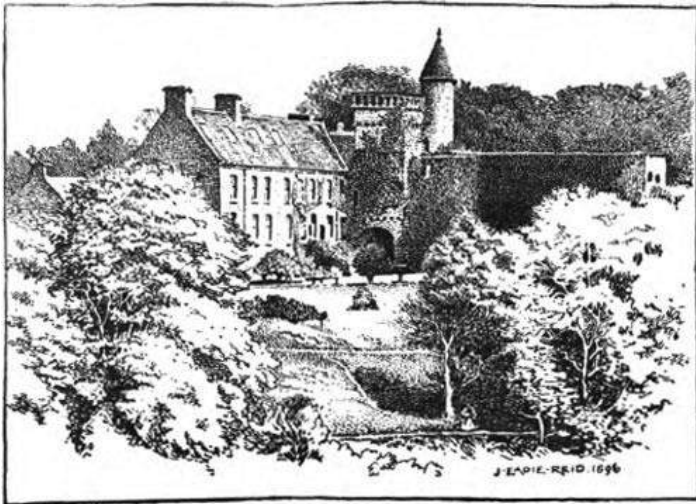
*Tradition asserts, however, that the piper found his way into a secret subterranean passage leading from the Castle to a cave on the sea-shore, from which, however, he was unable to find egress, and where he perished miserably.*

*Along this passage the troubled ghost of the piper was long reputed to march, backwards and forwards, playing the weirdest of pipe music, and so indicating, as was firmly believed, to the awe-stricken listeners above, the line of direction of the secret underground passage (Wood, 244-245).*

Returning to Raymond Lamont-Brown's "Scottish Folklore," we find more stories of castle hauntings involving music. The first story takes place in Airlie Castle, "the former traditional home of the Earls of Airlie at Cortachy."

In 1640, Airlie Castle was burned down after it was captured by the Earl of Argyll. The castle's drummer, from the Cameron clan, was responsible for sounding the alarm to alert the Ogilvie family, the castle's defenders, of danger.

When he failed to do so, and the castle fell, the drummer was blamed. The others escaped, but apparently locked the drummer inside to burn alive as the flames engulfed Airlie. Ever since his horrible death, the Airlie Drummer returns to warn the Ogilvie family of impending deaths (Lamont-Brown, 70).



*The Bonnie House O' Airlie - illustration from  
The Bards of Angus and the Mearns 1897*

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The second story is brief enough to quote in its entirety. Lamont-Brown says:

*Inverary Castle, home of the Dukes of Argyll, is haunted by the 'Harper of Inverary.' Heard in the area of the Blue Room the ghost is thought to be that of a man hanged at the time the Marquis of Montrose was hunting down the then lard.*  
(Lamont-Brown, 97)

In her book "Skye: The Island and its Legends," Otta F. Swire describes several hauntings of Duntulm Castle.

One story arose from an unfortunate, albeit somewhat humorous, mix-up. Hugh Uisdean MacGillespic Chleirich (we'll just call him Hugh) was the cousin of Donald Gorm Mor, chief of Clan Macdonald of Clanranald.

Hugh, apparently, was known as murderous bugger. He had previously plotted to murder Donald Gorm Mor, as well as having murdered

several other individuals. But, Hugh's next plot against the life of his cousin would prove to be his undoing.

This plot was quite elaborate. Hugh went through the effort to build a custom castle just to carry out his sinister deed. Castle Uisdean, also called Hugh's Castle, was constructed on the Isle of Skye. The castle was built with no windows and only one door, to prohibit Donald's escape.



*The ruins of Uisdean Castle, photo by Bert  
Kaufmann Wiki Commons*

When the castle was finished, Hugh planned a house warming party and happily composed his invitations. He wrote a very flowery invite to his cousin Donald to lure him in. Meanwhile, Hugh wrote another letter to a friend called Martin, of East Trotternish, known as “a mean rogue,” giddily laying out his plot to murder Donald which would be completed by Martin.

Well, as fortune would have it, after the letters were sealed in their individual packets, they were accidentally mixed up. Martin received the sugary sweet invitation while Donald received the letter describing the plot on his own life!

As you may well imagine, this did not go over well with Donald Gorm Mor. He stormed Hugh’s castle and laid siege to it until it fell. Hugh tried to escape dressed as a woman. But, apparently, his husky body frame gave him away and he was captured.

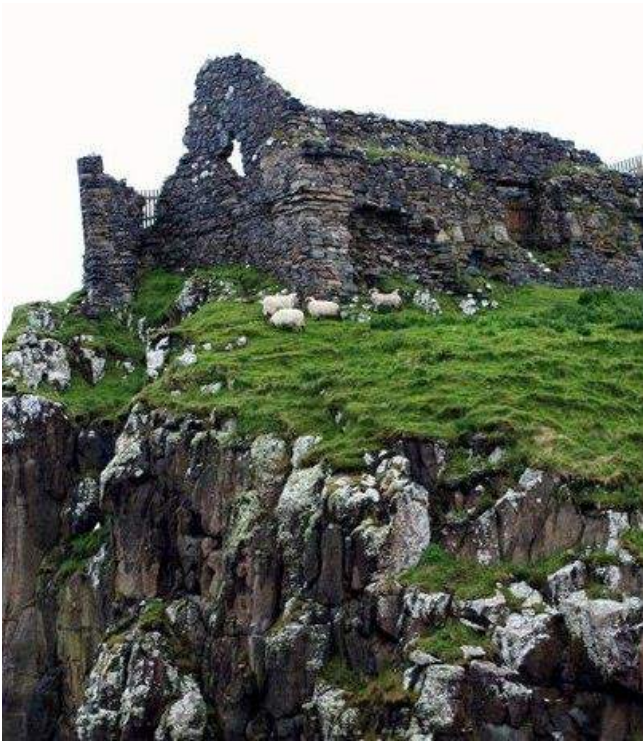
Donald hauled his cousin Hugh back to his own castle, Duntulm, where Hugh was slowly killed. The method of execution was feeding him salted meat and fish without water until he died of dehydration. Hugh’s ghost is said to haunt Duntulm to this day (Swire, 52-53).

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*Ruins of Duntulm Castle. Photo by  
Andrew Wood Wiki Commons*

## About the Author:

Carolyn Emerick writes about the history, mythology, and folk belief of Northwestern Europe. She has a bachelor's degree in English literature, and possesses a lifelong learning and love of European cultural heritage.



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